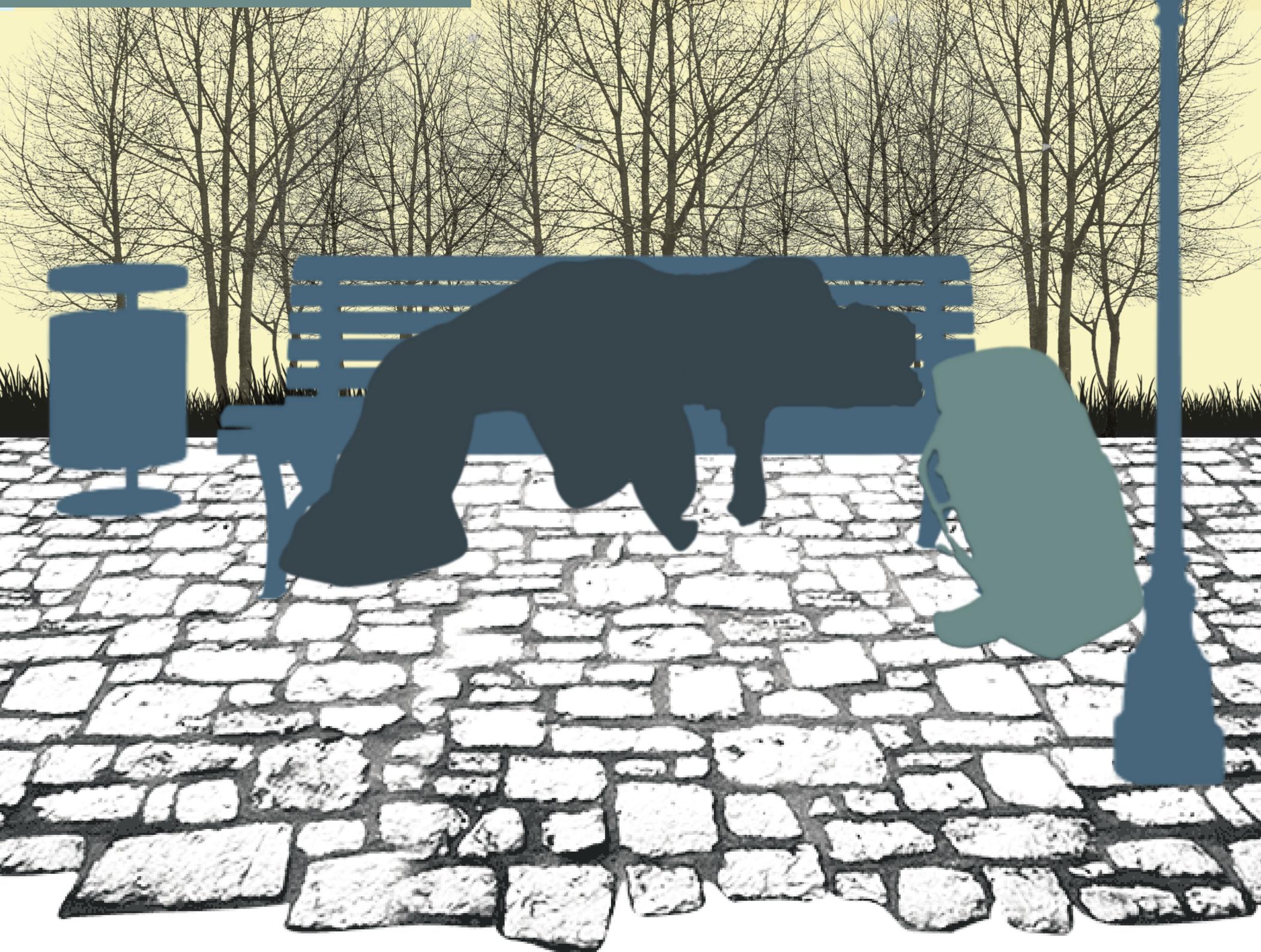


Roma Experiencing Rough Sleeping in Westminster and Beyond:

Evaluating New Approaches

April 2023



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Executive Summary

This report was commissioned by the Westminster Homelessness Partnership under the headline "Evaluating new approaches to working with Roma people experiencing rough sleeping in Westminster and beyond." The goal was to look for new working models in relation to Roma experiencing rough sleeping in London, build new knowledge on their migration patterns and routes into destitution, their experiences in Westminster, and the integration or creation of policies and recommendations that could serve as tools to improve current initiatives and services.

The main method for data collection was semi-structured interviews with professionals and Roma experiencing rough sleeping. The researchers, Lauritzen and Dumitru, carried out interviews with 15 professionals, and Dumitru and Mižigár interviewed 18 Roma individuals experiencing rough sleeping. All the Roma individuals were originally from Romania.

Roma is a transnational and largely heterogeneous minority with one thousand years of history in Europe. It is estimated that approximately two million Roma live in Romania. Roma were enslaved in Romania for more than five hundred years (1300s - 1850s), and large numbers were exterminated during the Roma Holocaust. During Communism in Romania, Roma were not recognised as an ethnic group nor represented as a national group in decision making, and their needs as a collective were not taken care of. At the fall of the regime in 1989, Roma were the first to lose their jobs, social programmes were lost, and many Roma lost their rights to land. In the early 1990s, Roma communities became a target of violent persecution throughout Romania. Roma individuals were killed in violent attacks, and Roma villages were burnt. Racism and discrimination still affect Roma lives, and today 40% of Roma in Romania live in absolute poverty, and an additional 35% live at risk of poverty. Some Roma leave Romania to earn money in other countries.

Roma Experiencing Rough Sleeping in Westminster

In Westminster 24,8% of the people recorded on CHAIN[1] as rough sleeping between April 2021 - March 2022 were Romanian nationals, and 15.8% self-identified

as either Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller, White - Gypsy/Irish Traveller, or White - Roma.

Of the 18 Roma experiencing rough sleeping interviewed in this study:

- Ten had travelled directly to Westminster from Romania, whereas eight had come from other locations in the United Kingdom or other countries.
- Push factors from Romania include poverty and discrimination in the work market.
- Pull factors to Westminster included the busy streets where they feel safer.
- Most had followed a circular migration pattern.
- A majority said they felt ashamed when begging.
- A majority said they want to find work in the United Kingdom.
- Many have severe physical and mental health needs.
- Most had experienced harassment, hate crimes, and discrimination on a regular basis, including by the public.
- Most reported having been harassed by uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers or police officers, and are consequently afraid of the police.
- Forming groups and sticking together is a coping mechanism in facing harassment, hate crimes, and discrimination.
- Roma appear underrepresented in the caseload of a local modern slavery service, and professionals fear that services may not be identifying individuals who are at risk in that community. At the same time, our interviews suggest that it should not be assumed that most of the Roma clients are subject to modern slavery.

Learning Outcomes from the Work by the Roma Rough Sleeping Team and Related Services

A report published in 2016 by the Roma Support Group about Roma experiencing rough sleeping in Westminster concluded that charities were not sufficiently engaging with Roma experiencing rough sleeping. This study found that this has drastically changed. Both the majority of Roma people and the professionals interviewed in this study share the understanding that the positive

[1]The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), is a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN is the most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping in the UK.

change results from the focused work of the Roma mediators in the Roma Rough Sleeping Team. The Roma Rough Sleeping Team is commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to work in the boroughs with the highest needs. It is funded by The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the GLA and delivered by St Mungo's.

The team is staffed by a service manager, a coordinator, and three Roma mediators. The concept of Roma mediators was first developed by Romani CRISS in Romania in 1997. It was later recognized as "best practice" at the European level and adopted by the Council of Europe who have trained over 1500 mediators in more than 20 countries. Roma mediators is therefore a concept that has been tested and proven to work in other contexts.

Over the 15 months from January 2021 to March 2022, the Roma mediators:

- Worked with a total of 359 Roma clients.
- Carried out intensive case work with 116 individuals.
- Gave advice on the EU Settlement Scheme to 103 individuals.
- Supported 78 Roma clients in obtaining short-term accommodation (*Everyone In*, SWEP, B&B).
- Supported five individuals in obtaining long-term accommodation.
- Worked with 12 safeguarding cases.
- Delivered trainings on Roma and antigypsyism to 135 professionals.
- Organised 11 Pan London Roma Group Meetings.

Other learning outcomes documented in this report is that:

- The Roma Clinic has been successful in supporting Roma service users' access to healthcare.
- Building trust is key for all services to be successful, including supporting Roma service users in obtaining employment and accommodation.
- Professionals counter antigypsyism through escalating individual cases, but more systematic work is needed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

All in all, we have found that the new approaches to working with Roma people have been highly successful

as a step towards equalising access to services in a non-discriminatory way. Our basic recommendation is that the Roma Rough Sleeping Team with Roma mediators and related services are funded to continue their work long-term and to expand this to other areas of London.

We also recommend that the Westminster Homelessness Partnership work to influence relevant policymakers and other stakeholders in local, regional, and national government in order to:

- Provide accommodation and qualified immigration advice to all Roma experiencing rough sleeping as an emergency response.
- Expand successful services to other relevant areas of London.
- Strengthen the Roma Rough Sleeping team to expand their capacity to focus on finding accommodation for Roma clients.
- Expand the work of the Roma health clinic to include working with the NHS and specialist mental health teams such as the JHT to improve access to mental health support and treatment for Roma clients.
- Continue the rights-based approach, including strengthening legal advice given to Roma service users.
- Investigate how each of their services for street homeless people can be made accessible to people in couples and family groups who otherwise might be excluded.
- Continue the promising work by the Roma employment coach, including innovative work with training and routes to employment.
- Use the Pan London Roma Group to facilitate dialogue between uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers and police officers on best practice.
- Employing staff specifically responsible for countering antigypsyism within the police and invest in training of civil enforcement officers and the police to counter antigypsyism.
- Invest in intensive training of the homelessness sector so professionals at different levels are even better equipped to discover and counter antigypsyism. Employ a professional in the Roma Rough Sleeping Team to lead this work.

-
- Enhance dialogue and partnerships with businesses to create work opportunities and better relationships between Roma experiencing rough sleeping, businesses and the general public.
 - Continue to build trust and permanently fund a modern slavery team to disclose and tackle modern slavery.
 - Fund further research to strengthen the knowledge base and facilitate an evidence-based approach.
-

1 Roma Experiencing Rough Sleeping in Westminster and Beyond: Evaluating New Approaches

The study was funded by World Habitat through the Westminster Homelessness Partnership, who commissioned the research through MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society. Dr Solvor Mjøberg Lauritzen and MA Maria Dumitru were the lead researchers. Michal Mižu Mižigár assisted in the field research in London.

The aims of the project were to accomplish the following:

- Describe the situation of Roma people experiencing rough sleeping in Westminster, including the migration patterns and routes into destitution in London, as well as ways in which we can understand different groups within the overall population.
- Capture the learning and outcomes from the work that has been done by the Roma Rough Sleeping Team.
- Develop policy and practice recommendations relating to reducing destitution and rough sleeping amongst Roma people who have been homeless in Westminster and beyond.

Previous research into Roma experiencing rough sleeping in London was published by the Roma Support Group in 2016. This report suggested that charities were not sufficiently engaging with Roma experiencing rough sleeping.

A new approach – the Roma Rough Sleeping Team established by St Mungo’s – was consequently piloted in 2021–2022 and transformed into a regular service in 2022. The new approaches evaluated in this report centre on the Roma Rough Sleeping Team and their closest partners, found within St Mungo’s, The Passage and the Great Chapel Street NHS health centre.

The main method used for data collection was semi-structured interviews. Lauritzen and Dumitru carried out interviews with 15 professionals from the rough sleeping

sector in Westminster. The interviews, lasting for an average of 1.5 hours, were recorded and transcribed (see Appendix B for a list of interviewees).

The interviews with Roma experiencing rough sleeping were carried out in Westminster by Dumitru and Mižigár. Both researchers have thorough experience of working with marginalised communities. They both identify as Roma, and between them, they are fluent in both Romani and Romanian languages. Their insider perspectives strongly contributed to trust-building with the interviewees and to the collection of more trustworthy data.

Dumitru and Mižigár spent two weeks in Westminster. They participated in sessions with outreach workers on the streets and with Roma mediators who introduced them to places and people. One interview was carried out in the presence of a Roma mediator, and the rest of the interviews were carried out without the presence of anyone else. The interviews were conducted in the City of Westminster. Eighteen Roma experiencing rough sleeping were interviewed. The average time of the interviews was 25 minutes.

The cold weather conditions at the time when the research was carried out limited our access to interviewees. All interviews were anonymised, and the names used in this report are pseudonyms.

Some interviews were conducted where the person was begging or selling magazines and others in private rooms, in parks, in cafes, and/or on the street.

The Roma experiencing rough sleeping were in general eager to participate and willingly shared information with the researchers. If the location and the environment allowed for a more in-depth interview, the participants answered almost all questions. However, when the participants were in the cold, suffering or working, the interview would last for a shorter time, and it would be focused mainly on needs, recommendations, and

relationships with the services (see Appendix B for a list of people interviewed). Due to the sensitivity of the topics discussed in the interviews, the researchers decided not to record any names or addresses of Roma service users, just gender, age, and region. The researchers recorded, transcribed, and translated all interviews into English, adhering to general ethical standards of voluntary participation, informed consent, and anonymisation (see Appendix C for elaboration on ethical considerations). All names have been changed to protect identity.

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Migration from Romania to the United Kingdom

Migration from Romania is not just a Roma phenomenon. Romanians were on the top 20 list of international migrants in 2020 when 17% of Romanian citizens had emigrated (World Migration Report [WMR], 2022, p. 25). Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, one million nationals returned to Romania in 2020 (WMR, 2022, p. 95). Historically, migrants from Romania have mainly migrated to Southern Europe, with Italy and Spain being the two main destinations. Reasons for this include linguistic proximity, migration networks, geographical proximity, and a large amount of seasonal work (Fic, 2013, p. 5). The combination of Romania and Bulgaria joining the European Union (EU), the financial crisis, and increased unemployment rates in Southern Europe led to many Roma seeking work in other countries in Western Europe.

In the United Kingdom, Romanians make up the second largest EU-born group of immigrants, with 427,000 people (Vergas-Silva & Walsh, 2020, p. 7).

The most common reason for EU citizens to migrate to the United Kingdom is for work. As of 2014, the median disposable household income was 4.2 times higher in the United Kingdom than in Romania, and the unemployment rate in Romania was 8% (Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, 2016). When comparing the number of people experiencing rough sleeping in London

between 2009–2010 and 2015–2016, European Economic Area (EEA) nationals accounted for two-thirds of the increase.

1.1.2 Rough sleeping and a "Hostile Environment"

In 2008, responding to the increasing numbers of Eastern European nationals experiencing rough sleeping in England, the Labour government launched a new rough sleeping strategy which envisaged the Home Office taking a more active role in tackling the issue. Beginning in early 2010, Home Office Immigration Compliance and Enforcement (HO-ICE) teams began working alongside charities, issuing "minded to remove" warning letters to EU citizens experiencing rough sleeping who were not felt to be accepting other offers of help, including assistance to return to their home country (Williamson, 2019).

The letters warned that they would need to exercise their EU treaty rights and engage with realistic options off the streets to remain in the country, otherwise they could be detained and sent back to their country of origin. Some charities choosing to work with the Home Office in this way saw the action as a continuation of "assertive outreach." However, from 2012, an explicit goal for the Coalition Government became the creation of a "hostile environment" for undocumented migrants (Travis, 2013; Liberty, 2019). The aim of this paradigm was to make it so unbearable for undocumented migrants in Britain that they will leave voluntarily. In practical terms, it means, for example, that migrants falling under this category were cut off from access to many public services and benefits. The government's restrictions on benefit entitlements for EEA nationals in 2014 made it harder for services to prevent rough sleeping and provide secure accommodation (Greater London Authority, 2018). Critics of the "hostile environment" paradigm argued that charities that were working with the Home Office to tackle rough sleeping were collaborating in creating this environment. In December 2017, the High Court ruled that the Home Office had been acting unlawfully in deporting EU citizens who were sleeping rough, and the practice ended (Williamson, 2019).

1.1.3 The EU Settlement Scheme

At the time of the research, EU citizens, including Roma from Romania are eligible to visit the United Kingdom for up to six months without a visa, but a valid passport is needed for people not registered under the EU Settlement Scheme. Those not registered under the EU Settlement Scheme are not able to work in the United Kingdom, may be subject to financial charges for some NHS care (although they can still access A&E and GP services, which are exempt from overseas charging), or access public funds such as benefits and pensions. They are further required to apply for visas, which are granted according to a points-based system that prioritises "skills and talent over where a person comes from" if they want to stay longer than six months (UK Government, 2020).

Those who could document that their settlement began before 31 December 2020 were eligible to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme before the deadline, which was 30 June 2021, for most people. Through this scheme, individuals could be granted settled or pre-settled status (UK Government, 2020).

Settled status is granted to those who can prove continuous residence in the country over the last five years, specified as at least six months in any twelve-month period (UK Government, 2023). Professionals interviewed in this study explained that documenting residence has proven difficult for many Roma experiencing rough sleeping.

Pre-settled status may be granted to Romanian citizens who have not yet lived in the United Kingdom for a continuous five-year period. To be granted pre-settled status, the individual must document that they have been a resident of the United Kingdom in the six months up to the start of their residence before 31 December 2020, and that they have not subsequently broken their continuous residence in the United Kingdom. Pre-settled status is granted for a five-year period. After the end of this period, the person may apply for settled status. Other routes to apply to the EU settlement scheme are also possible, for example through a family member (UK Government 2020; n.d).

With settled or pre-settled status, people are able to work in the United Kingdom, use the NHS for free, enrol in education, may access some public funds such as benefits and pensions, and travel in and out of the United Kingdom (UK Government, n.d.). Until 31 December 2025, Romanian nationals with pre-settled or settled status may enter the country with an ID card. After this date, a passport will be needed (UK Government, 2022).

1.1.4 COVID-19

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, on 26 March 2020, the Everyone In initiative was launched to bring those experiencing rough sleeping into emergency accommodation. People were offered urgent accommodation as a way to enable people to self-isolate and to stop the spread of COVID-19 regardless of their immigration status. Everyone In was launched by the UK government, but it had the support and help of homeless organisations and local authorities. Some Roma who were interviewed in this study also benefited from this initiative. Those who were placed indoors reported that they received support due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

As Jackie[2] put it, "*It was COVID, and they put everyone inside, including some of us.*"

Everyone In was widely praised for preventing the spread of COVID in the homeless population and many individuals were supported to move from the hotels into more permanent accommodation (Kerlake Commission, 2021). Professionals interviewed confirmed that this government initiative worked really well and that all that was necessary were joining efforts, willingness, resources and creativity.

In Romania, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered several waves of racism, especially against marginalised Roma. Roma were then scapegoated and accused of spreading the virus, which intensified the hatred against them. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020), news conveyed lots of misinformation that portrayed Roma and Travellers all around Europe as disrespecting the rules of the pandemic, infecting others, and, above all, reinforcing the historical stereotype of Roma as criminals. These expressions of hatred led to the confinement (lockdown) of entire Roma communities and to further police attacks and social rejection. Police brutality in Romania has been a major issue for Roma communities, as well as access to health support and healthcare in connection with COVID-19 (Dumitru, 2021; Matache & Bhabha, 2020).

[2] All names have been changed to protect identity.

2

Roma Experiencing Rough Sleeping in Westminster

In this section, we will describe the situation of Roma people experiencing rough sleeping in Westminster, including the migration patterns and routes into destitution, as well as ways in which we can understand different groups within the overall population.

The annual CHAIN report for Westminster (April 2021–March 2022) shows that 24.8% of the people recorded by outreach teams as rough sleeping in Westminster are Romanian nationals, with the total number of Romanian people registered at 378. Out of these, 155 had not been previously recorded as rough sleepers, 161 had been seen rough sleeping in the previous year, and 62 had been seen rough sleeping prior to 2020/21 but not during 2020/21. Eighty individuals from Central and Eastern Europe were supported to reconnect with their home country over the course of the year. When asked about ethnicity, 15.8% of the total population sleeping rough responded that they were either Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller, White – Gypsy/Irish Traveller, or White – Roma (the number could be higher, as 11.6% of respondents did not wish to disclose their ethnicity).

The Westminster Street Outreach Service (SOS) engaged with 271 Roma experiencing rough sleeping from August 2019 - May 2022. A significantly higher number of the Roma rough sleepers were male (172 males versus 99 females). Their ages were as followed:

Age	Total
Under 18	14
18- 24	59
25 - 39	104
40 - 59	83
+ 60	11
Grand Total	271

The data collected in this study show that the Roma experiencing rough sleeping in Westminster are a heterogeneous group. Still, they shared certain characteristics. One trait that was untypical of the profile of the wider rough sleeping population, is that very few of the Roma service users interviewed revealed support needs around substance addiction.

It is estimated that there are approximately two million Roma in Romania (Council of Europe, 2020), and the vast majority live in poverty, with as many as 40% living in extreme poverty (Roma Inclusion Index, 2015). Out of the 18 Roma experiencing rough sleeping interviewed for this study, the majority had lived below the poverty line in Romania. Some mentioned that in Romania they lacked an indoor toilet, running water, or a functional kitchen and that they lived in overcrowded accommodation.

The racial discrimination targeting Roma leads, among other things, to unequal access to justice, housing, education, employment, healthcare, and public services (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Roma, for example, have lower access to employment than do non-Roma and are therefore often involved in informal and irregular employment. The severe inequality has been produced by historical racial oppression such as Roma slavery and the Roma Holocaust and has been fuelled by prejudice and stereotypes that keep the disparities alive. Roma are, for example, perceived to be lazy and work-shy, not trustworthy, criminals and professional thieves, nomadic, and not committed to their local communities or country (Hancock, 1997; Lee, 2019; McGarry, 2017; Council of Europe, 2021). A survey from 2014 showed that 50% of people in Britain have a negative view of Roma (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 30). Homelessness is not only pushed by poverty; certain groups are more likely to become homeless than others, and factors such as ethnicity, education, adverse childhood experiences, gender, and employment all intersect and play a role (Fitzpatrick & Bramley, 2018).

All 18 Roma service users interviewed for this study mentioned dependants that rely on them to earn

money including children, parents, or other family members, their lack of education (from illiterate to primary school average), serious health issues, and mental health problems, many of them developed while sleeping rough.

All 18 participants further came from either segregated or remote communities in Romania where the possibility of access to quality education, employment, health, or infrastructure is extremely low. Their average income per month in Romania was between 500 and 700 lei (86–120 pounds). They all had extensive informal work experience in agriculture, in factories, with animals, in construction, in domestic work, and with cleaning. Most of the people interviewed were trying to earn a living in London by selling magazines, begging, working as street artists, doing cash-in-hand jobs or occasionally working in construction.

Regarding hopes and plans for the future, three mentioned that due to the harsh life as a consequence of sleeping rough, they would like to return to Romania and to their families, whereas 15 mentioned that they want to build a life in the United Kingdom, to seek a job, bring their family, and have more opportunities here. The motivation for this is not just economic but also related to safety: twelve participants reported that they feel safer in the United Kingdom than back in Romania. They mentioned health services as an important reason for staying, as well as the opportunity to earn an income to secure food every day.

Level of Impoverishment



2.1 Migration Patterns

The theory of push-and-pull factors emphasises that to understand migration we must both consider what pushes people to leave their home in for example Romania, becoming emigrants — and what pulls them to the location where they become immigrants – such as the United Kingdom and Westminster. Poverty and discrimination were the most common factors mentioned as push factors for the participants to leave Romania. Regarding pull factors, 17 out of the 18 Roma service users interviewed in the study expressed that they wanted to work to earn money to improve their own lives and the lives of their families. This finding was confirmed by Roma mediators, who stated that most of the Roma people they encounter are bread winners and send money back to their families in Romania.

The routes to Westminster varied between the Roma service users. Ten participants had travelled directly to Westminster, whereas eight had come from other locations in the United Kingdom or other countries such as France, Denmark, or Italy. They all had in common that they came to or chose to stay in Westminster because the busy streets made them feel safer, there were public spaces where they could stay, and the busy roads provided opportunities for making money.

A professional suggested that there is a fear among some politicians that providing services such as accommodation for people experiencing rough sleeping might be a pull factor: "there has always been pushback from particularly the politicians, where they fear that if they open up Roma specific provision in one area, that it will become the focal point." In the interviews, we addressed this assumption, but neither the practitioners nor the service users interviewed believed that services had this effect.

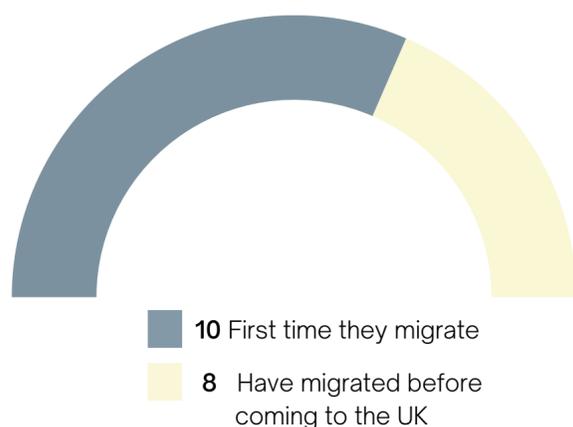
According to the professionals interviewed for this study, the pattern of migration is typically circular. Most of them have homes back in Romania, and they travel to the United Kingdom to earn money to support their families back home. This does not mean that they are not interested in settling in the United Kingdom, but this has so far not been a feasible option for many due to lack of work opportunities.

Although the number of years varies, Roma mediators explained that most people have been coming to London for years to earn money through either begging or employment in the informal employment market. Whereas some people interviewed in this study had around 8–10 years of experience migrating to Westminster, others were newly documented or undocumented migrants. The typical pattern described is that they come to London for 2–3

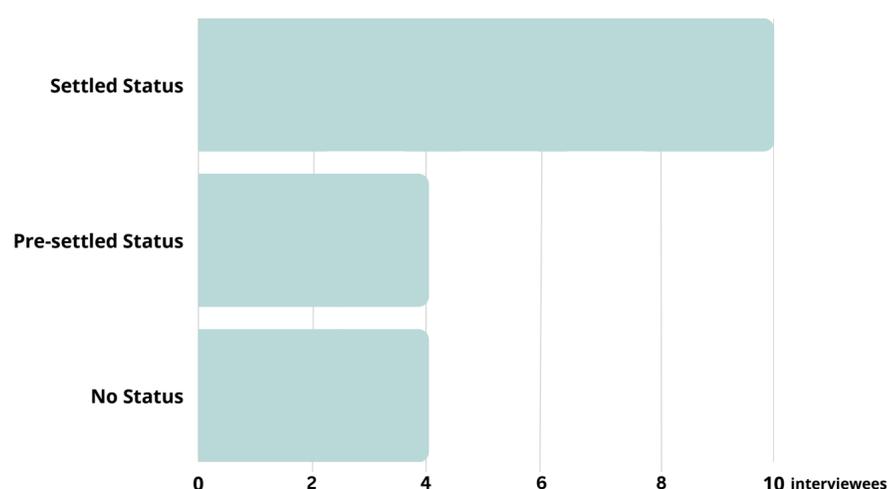
months and return to Romania for a similar amount of time, and this pattern continues for 4–5 years. The money they earn from either begging or work is mainly spent in Romania.

Some of the participants came to Westminster with a history of migration from other countries, such as France, Denmark and Italy, or other areas of the United Kingdom. The evidence on this is anecdotal, however, as the CHAIN[3] system used to record information is only used in London. The movement of people experiencing rough sleeping is therefore not tracked across the United Kingdom.

Story of Migration [4]



Status among the interviewees



Wanting to stay in the UK for a long term



2.2 Wanting to work

That Roma people are work-shy and do not want to engage in formal employment is an antigypsyist stereotype widely used to justify exploitation and exclusion of Roma people. Empirical studies clearly prove that being unemployed is not a deliberate choice, but a result of discrimination (Hyde, 2006).

The Campaigning and Policy Worker from the organisation Roma Support Group, explained:

"I have been working on the streets with more than 400 Roma rough sleepers, the majority of them want to work, they feel ashamed to beg, there are very few people who don't want to work. It is just that they lack the work requirements (English, formal work experience etc.). Some of them never made a CV. There is a huge need of supporting the Roma in achieving work."

Another professional put it this way:

"There is a public perception that these groups come over to just beg. Excuse me, but that's a load of rubbish. Who decides to come sleep on the streets of London to beg for what you're probably not going to

[3] The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), is a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN is the most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping in the UK.

[4] All the infographics presented in this report are developed from the interviews with 18 Roma experiencing rough sleeping.

make a lot of money for? It's ridiculous. Why would you put your family risk to do that? For me, there is an element of needing to dispel some of those myths about Roma. Cause they're just humans just like me and you .

Our collected data strengthen these statements as out of the 18 persons interviewed, 14 described that they feel shame for begging. Three of them expressed deep shame. The feeling of shame is strengthened by Romanian co-nationals who shame them for being in the United Kingdom. The Roma employment coach at working at The Passage, explained that she has often heard from her Roma service users that the stereotype that Roma do not want to work is translated into verbal attacks:

I did have conversations with clients where they did say: "look, people think that I am here to beg. But that is not something that I want to do. And it is not something that I do because I want to do it." I think there is a lot of misunderstanding around this. And it is really upsetting.

The frontline workers we interviewed explained that many Roma service users are eager to find meaningful employment and build a better life for themselves and their families, but low levels of education, a lack of English language skills and little to no previous experience with formal work make it harder for them to access employment. As a result, some end up with cash-in-hand jobs, such as washing cars.

Some professionals explained that they have encountered individuals who have not, for different reasons been interested in engaging meaningful employment. Our interviews with both Roma service users and professionals clearly show that these few individuals are the exception to the rule. Nonetheless, it serves as a reminder that the Roma experiencing rough sleeping are by no means a homogenous group.

Willing to get a formal job



Feeling ashamed about the act of begging



2.3 Modern Slavery

Exploitation and trafficking were recurring themes in discussions with professionals about Roma experiencing rough sleeping. On the one hand, many of the professionals interviewed said that their close contact with Roma clients had reassured them that most Roma clients were not subject to trafficking and exploitation. On the other hand, Roma appear under-represented in the caseload of the modern slavery service.

This was a concern for some professionals, who feared that this indicated that cases of exploitation are not being picked up on, perhaps because they are entangled with family groups or because Roma clients are at times afraid to speak with professionals. In the words of the Anti-Slavery Coordinator at The Passage:

"It is actually very rare that we have service users who identify as Roma. (...) It may be because the community is very closed. It is hard to reach them. And also it is very hard for them, it is very hard for one or two to get away and come in here to ask for help."

The complexity of the situation expressed by professionals is confirmed by previous research. In a study in 2017, Rice and Sebok interviewed 21 people from Romania living in encampments in London, of whom five identified as Roma. All 21 people interviewed had experienced exploitation in the job market. In our interviews with Roma experiencing rough sleeping, we encountered and interviewed one person for whom we suspected that work exploitation had

taken place, but we did not apply methods designed for disclosing human trafficking and so cannot be conclusive on this.

In 2011, the European Roma Rights Centre published the report "Breaking the Silence. Trafficking in Romani Communities." They conclude that Roma are highly overrepresented among trafficked persons from Romania and that women and children are particularly vulnerable. The overrepresentation is found to be a consequence of ethnic and gender discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion. In other words, trafficking is not a "Roma issue" as such, but the overrepresentation of Roma in trafficking is a consequence of the structural discrimination of Roma in other areas. Combatting the trafficking of Roma individuals is therefore closely entangled with other efforts such as anti-discrimination measures and poverty reduction. Although Roma are overrepresented among individuals subject to modern slavery, this does not mean that most Roma experiencing rough sleeping in London are exploited. In discussing the issue, the Anti-Slavery Coordinator at The Passage echoes findings from the Scandinavian context.

In a study designed to disclose cases of modern slavery, Friberg and Tyldum (2019) found in their 1500-person sample, that most Roma in Scandinavian cities were not subject to modern slavery. They highlight that most were well informed about what they could expect when arriving in Scandinavia. The Anti-Slavery Coordinator at the Passage has made a similar observation: "Lots of people tell us no, they knew what they were coming to do, even if it was to sleep rough and beg." Friberg and Tyldum (2019) raised some further points that can be transferred across contexts. We heard from London-based professionals that they get concerned when, for example, they see vans transporting people to their "begging spots". What is observed here might be exploitation, but it might, as Friberg and Tyldum (2019) pointed out, also be signs of self-organisation, which makes the people begging less vulnerable to exploitation.

Another concern was that men sometimes turn up when professionals try to approach women who are begging. Friberg and Tyldum (2019) argue that this might be a sign of collaboration, where women are doing the actual begging and the men protect them from, for example, sexual assaults. The issue is, in other words, highly complex. It seems likely some Roma sleeping rough are subject to modern slavery. At the same time, our interviews suggest that it should not be assumed that most of the Roma clients are subject to modern slavery.

2.4 Severe Health Needs

In summarising their learning outcomes from the first year of work, the Roma Rough Sleeping Team affirmed that Roma people who are sleeping rough tend to have high healthcare needs, particularly those who are older in age.

Frontline workers in Westminster testified to the same in this study, indicating that the Roma cohort in Westminster has higher health needs compared with cohorts in other boroughs. Women are highlighted as those with the most severe health conditions, with heart problems and diabetes frequently named as examples. One concern raised by several professionals was that Roma rough sleepers with diabetes often go unmedicated or are medicated on and off.

All 18 Roma service users interviewed described signs of mental health problems, self-reporting anxiety, depression, and severe despair. More women self-reported anxiety and high levels of stress, whereas men more often self-reported severe depression and hopelessness.

For example, Georgia, from the province of Moldova in Romania, is begging to make an income. Her husband is back in Romania taking care of their children. In Romania, she worked with animals and took care of the house. She previously migrated to Italy, where she worked, and then to Denmark, where she begged and recycled plastic for survival. She has settled status in the United Kingdom. Georgia only mentioned her trouble and grief when we asked her about her children.

Her 21-year-old daughter had passed away, and she was extremely sad, grieving while begging to send money back home. She used to sleep on the streets, but with the help of the Roma mediators, she now sleeps indoors in a temporary hotel. She described that her biggest dream is to bring her family to the United Kingdom to start a better life. She comes from a very poor family in Romania, but she wants to offer a better life to her children. She described her present life as very difficult:

"I am very sad because my little girl passed away, the mediators know, and they take care of me. On top of

that, people here are harassing me, I don't know why they mess with me? I fear someone will come and finish with me here on the streets. I sleep now indoors but I still have to come and sit down."

Another example was given by David. He used to do business with old cars in Romania and first came to the UK in 1994. He described himself as a brilliant singer but explained that since last year, he has not been able to sing because he is feeling sad and his health has worsened. He previously lived in Birmingham, but when his relatives kicked him out he came to Westminster where he is experiencing rough sleeping and begging to survive. He has pre-settled status but is not in contact with the services as he just recently arrived in London. He only has one friend in London. In his own words:

"I can't sing anymore... I'm very sad, I closed myself, and I can't sing anymore. I miss my family a lot, but right now, I am doing everything I can to collect some money and go and see my daughter. I am single, my wife divorced me and since then I stopped singing, I got so sick with diabetes and psoriasis and obesity, and now I am not happy [crying]. I don't even know how long I will survive here on these streets."

Furthermore, due to the harsh sleeping conditions, the Roma are subject to psychological and social distress. Both men and women confront emotional issues such as sadness, constant fear, frustration, anger, helplessness, hopelessness, and despair. The women in particular experienced deeper physical issues such as fatigue, lack of sleep, and loss of appetite. There were also instances of self-reported alcohol misuse.

Anne has serious health issues and is suffering from a tumour. She can barely walk and is severely underweight. She has settled status and receives £300 per month in benefits, but also begs to support her family. While on the streets, she experiences harassment, racism, and verbal abuse:

"I have too many pains on my shoulders. I have a crazy man back home, and we live four families in two rooms in Romania. He has mental problems and is an alcoholic. I have a tumour, I'm sick. The children called me to come home for Christmas, they wanted to see me because they are afraid that maybe I will soon die and we don't spend time together."

These situations are accelerated by sleeping rough and lack of access to physical and mental health services. Moreover, not knowing the language and lacking

knowledge of mental health issues make it more difficult for them to seek help. Some who were interviewed stated that they received health support and medication for diabetes, sight issues, heart issues, and urinary issues, but no participants mentioned receiving support or treatment for their mental health.



have worsened their health condition while **Sleeping Rough in Westminster**

2.5 Hostility and Antigypsyism

As the following sections will reveal, Roma people experience hostility and antigypsyism in a range of different situations. Identifying exactly why a person is harassed or discriminated against is difficult, but the professionals we interviewed were of the impression that it was often intersectional:

Roma experiencing rough sleeping are discriminated against as immigrants from Eastern Europe, as Roma, as poor people, and as people experiencing rough sleeping, in addition to mental or physical illness and gender.

They arrived at this conclusion because of the circumstances in which the discrimination or harassment had occurred, and the content in the words or actions used. Examples from our interviews included one where the client's Eastern European accent seemed to trigger a change in behaviour from a public official, while in another instance it was believed that the client was probably stopped by the police because they were wearing traditional Roma clothes.

According to some professionals we interviewed, the Roma experiencing rough sleeping are described negatively in media and experience discriminatory treatment from children's services and the police.

We did not identify any other study addressing discrimination and hate speech/crimes directed towards Roma experiencing rough sleeping in London. This is

striking considering that our study found it to be widespread: all 18 Roma service users we interviewed had experienced discrimination and harassment, and all the outreach workers and mediators we interviewed testified about having witnessed discrimination and harassment. Research from other contexts shows that Roma migrants experiencing rough sleeping are prone to experience discrimination and harassment (Barker, 2017; Damsa, 2015; Djuve et al., 2015; Dumitru, 2020; Langaas, 2017; Memetovic, 2021).

The 18 Roma service users interviewed described that they face harassment, including sexual harassment, incidents motivated by hate, and constant fear. The feeling of fear is compounded by harassment from uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers or the police. The experiences of racism and hostility are described to happen on a regular basis.

There have, for example, been instances where Roma have been rejected at the entrance of coffee shops and bars, as the people working there assumed they wanted to use the toilet without buying anything.

Incidents suffered



Spaces where the Incidents/Harassment were encountered



2.6 Hostility from uniformed security, civil enforcement officers and the police

Roma people come from their home country, Romania, with a serious distrust of police forces. Historically, the police in Romania have both failed to protect Roma against violence from community members and been perpetrators themselves, through harassment, persecution, violence and deportations (Equal Rights Trust, 2015; European Roma Rights Centre, 2000). When Roma migrate, this fear is transferred with them and is reinforced by the hostility with which they are met by uniformed security guards, civil enforcement officers or police officers in the UK.

Of the 18 participants interviewed, 12 expressed that uniformed security guards, civil enforcement officers or police officers have been the biggest issue that they have encountered when sleeping rough in London and Westminster.

Some said they have been arrested by police for 24–48 hours without being given any explanation and that they were just begging when this happened. They have also had experiences with being prohibited in certain areas, being taken out of the city centre, and left at the margins, sometimes without their ID and money. Some explained that such harassment from the police was very common in the past but that it has changed for the better in recent years.

Jen explained "When I arrived here, the police were messing with us a lot. Every time I would see them, I would hide. I was scared they will check my ID, put me on arrest, or take me out of the city. We are just begging so I don't understand why they were like this."

Peter stated, "Years ago, the police used to chase me regularly. They checked my ID every time they would see me. I was even put in a police car and taken to the margin of London and left there. I was lucky that I knew the way back."

According to Jason, "The police are those who most harassed us. They took my ID and my money gained from begging. My wife was arrested for 24 hours without making any crime, just because she was begging."

Some frontline workers testified that their service users have had terrible experiences with the police and security teams at hotspots where Roma experiencing rough sleeping had set up encampments:

"They had teams with dogs, and they could be quite threatening, quite abusive, they were treating the rough sleepers in a way that you would not want anyone to be treated at all."

Some professionals believed that the police had at times breached legal regulations and procedures in their interactions with Roma. One example was that Roma are stopped by the police and have to hand over their ID for no reason, without having committed any crime or being arrested. Their judgment is that the Roma experience high levels of racial profiling. Similarly, professionals in the homelessness sector explained that business owners played a role in escalating confrontations between uniformed security guards, civil enforcement officers or police officers, by for example hiring private security guards to scare and forcibly remove Roma from business areas.



16 / 18 Declared to have been harassed by Police[5]

2.7 Fear of the Public

All 18 Roma participants interviewed also expressed that they fear members of the public, including other people experiencing rough sleeping and Romanian nationals. It is striking that this fear is found among Roma service users of all ages, and that it leads to feelings of strong anxiety.

As people experiencing rough sleeping have different disadvantages and resources are scarce, conflicts emerge between individuals and groups. Several interviewees stated that they have experienced verbal abuse, harassment, and physical attacks from people they believe to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

One interviewee, Anne, explained that she had been verbally attacked on the way to the interview appointment with us:

"We always have issues with drunk men and women, or drug addicts every day, believe me. Even now, before coming to meet you for the interview, a drunk man tried to steal my bags and hit me and was very angry at me. I managed to get away."

Another example of this issue was recounted by Gail. She used to sleep on the streets, sometimes alone without her partner or family members. She particularly feared uniformed enforcement officers or people under the influence of alcohol or drugs:

"I slept alone on the streets, and I was scared all the time. I used to sell magazines, I still begged, I recycled, but I got very ill with my spine. I also have diabetes and sleeping on the streets for 6-7 years has destroyed my health. I always lived with fear both from the police who might come and move me, or some drug addicts who used to harass me daily, calling me 'g*psy' spitting on me, or stealing my cup. You don't know how I was always on alert. I just didn't know who could hurt me. And some people here would defend me but not all, they are scared too. Now I can barely handle my emotions or my nerves."

[5] Most Roma interviewed testify that they have been harassed by the police. In interviews with professionals, we found that Roma experiencing rough sleeping are also harshly confronted by other uniformed enforcement officers such as civil enforcement officers or private uniformed security guards. We have therefore chosen to use the phrase 'uniformed security guards, civil enforcement officers or police officers' unless directly referring to direct quotes from interviews. We contacted the London police for an interview, but they did not respond.

Ten of the 18 Roma service users interviewed also mentioned that they have been mocked and verbally abused for begging and for sleeping on the streets by fellow Romanian nationals, who have shouted things such as 'go home,' 'go to work,' 'fu*king g*psy,' or 'you make us ashamed.' Although this does not mean that all Romanians have this attitude, the individuals performing verbal violence to the Roma experiencing rough sleeping are causing them to feel shame and fear.

The Roma service users believed that the harassment was a result of their ethnicity, their homelessness, and because they were seen as competitors while begging. Although both men and women were scared of being on the streets or sleeping rough, the Roma women had additional issues that made them even more vulnerable. The data collected for this study show that most Roma women experience violent attitudes composed of verbal abuse, threats, sexual harassment, and physical violence. All ten Roma women who were interviewed described that they faced regular sexual harassment by male members of the public.

According to Marianne, *"It is difficult here because it took many years until I got inside, people on the streets were messing with us, they still harass us, call me g*psy. Young men and old men show me the finger and shout nasty things."*

Jessica, stated, *"I have to be careful around, especially with drunk men, they are sometimes showing me their genitals, so I go to busier places to feel more protected."*

Anne said, *"They spit on me, kick my glass . . . people around show me the finger, they call me g*psy but I don't react, I pretend that I don't understand or I pretend to be crazy, but I clearly know that they swear at me. If they continue, I answer thank you and leave. What should I do? I cannot get into a fight with crazy people. I only weigh 30 kg, I cannot defend myself, they can kill me."*

According to Andrea, *"Before, I was begging at a traffic light, I couldn't make any money and I had to collect something to eat and a man threw food on my face, one threw water, one spit at me, one swore and one even tried to beat me, and he called me fu*king g*psy. Some people call us thieves. They said to 'go to work'. We have nothing to tell them, so we don't react, we are afraid, we have no power to do anything anyway."*

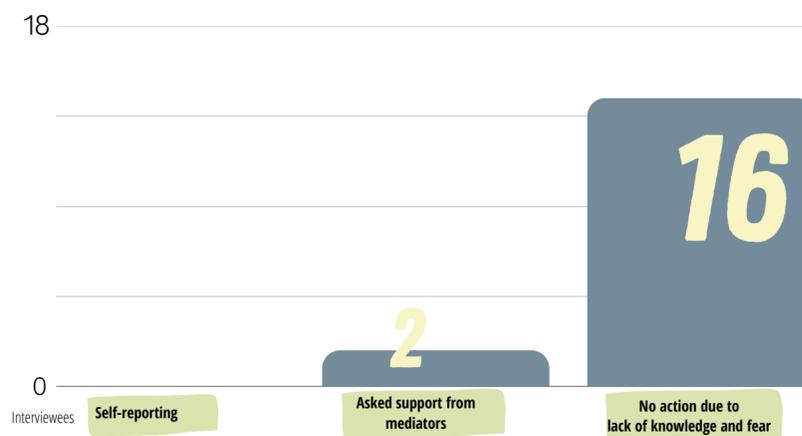
The 18 interviewees reported that the incidents/harassment were received mostly by the following groups:

- Other homeless people
- People affected by substances misuse
- Uniformed security guards, civil enforcements or police officers
- Romanian fellows
- Public in general

Reaction to Incidents/Harassment



Reporting of Incidents/Harassment



2.8 Meeting with Services and Authorities

Several of the professionals that we interviewed for this study testified that Roma service users are discriminated against in meetings with local authorities and in trying to access their rights. Racism is described as subtle and difficult to pinpoint but still obvious enough to those experiencing it.

As one frontline worker put it, "When dealing with the local authorities, Roma encounter racism. Immediately if they hear you are an Eastern European Roma, everything is changed, and you are met with hostility."

Some frontline workers had the impression that Roma experiencing rough sleeping are particularly discriminated against by the children's services. The discrimination is subtle; the service providers do not say that they do not help because they are Roma but give other excuses. That it is racial discrimination is, however, obvious to the professionals as it becomes systemic:

"We were seeing consistently that cases were rejected or were not handled or supported in the right way. And families were not helped. There is still a huge amount of work to be done. And I feel that as a team we have scratched the surface. . . We see a lot of discrimination based on how a family is structured in a Roma community compared to how they would see a UK national family."

A specific example was that a family was not housed together because the family members had different names. A challenge emerging in many of these cases is that the family constellations are different from those of many UK nationals in that they do not distinguish strictly between nuclear and extended family, and the children might be parented by, for example, uncles and aunts or grandparents

The team found that they might have to advocate and challenge statutory services so that the Roma families with children are offered what they are entitled to.

2.9 Antigypsyist Attitudes and Misconceptions in the Homelessness Sector

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2020) defined antigypsyism as "a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanization and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among others, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatization and the most blatant kind of discrimination." Commonly, antigypsyism is referred to as the last acceptable form of racism (McGarry, 2017) because it is so infiltrated in European society. It is therefore not surprising that our interviews also spoke of antigypsyist attitudes in the homelessness sector.

One of the perceptions mentioned in the interviews was that begging is understood by some as a cultural practice for Roma or that they travel to London because they are a nomadic people. That Roma are seen to beg more often than non-Roma Romanians is apparently used to underline this opinion. The professionals interviewed told that begging is seen by some as a choice, that it is "easier to just put the hand in front and wait for the pity from the world." Missing from this model of explanation is an understanding of the high levels of poverty and discrimination that hinder Roma from accessing the regular job market.

A professional explained that other professionals believe that Roma are not affected by the harassment and hate speech directed towards them. This is empirically wrong.

Our interviews show that discrimination and harassment severely impact the Roma experiencing rough sleeping, making them afraid and withdrawing from contact with non-Roma. The professionals interviewed further told that there is a tendency to blame the Roma for their own disadvantage. For example, that Roma are discriminated against because they behave in certain ways, such as sleeping in large encampments and not speaking English.

There is a need to understand that the racism against Roma precedes the presence of Roma immigrants in London. Therefore, the responsibility for countering antigypsyism cannot be placed with them – the racism will not go away simply by Roma learning English or advocating for themselves; it must be actively combatted (Thompson & Woodger, 2018 ; Greenfields & Rogers, 2020; James, 2020; Friends, Families & Travellers, 2023).

2.10 Forming Groups and Sticking Together as a Coping Mechanism

The hostility and harassment that they face, and the resulting fear, means that avoiding violence was a major priority for the Roma interviewees.

Both women and men reported that they seek places that are more populated as a way of ensuring their safety. Likewise, all the interviewees reported that they feel safer when accompanied by others, especially if they are family members or friends. If they have arrived alone in Westminster, they seek to pair up with others,

forming a small group which helps them to feel more protected.

Of the 18 Roma interviewed, four men were on their own in Westminster, and the remaining 14 were accompanied by others. The Roma who slept rough and were alone in Westminster experienced difficulties related to creating a circle where they were welcome and protected. They experienced high levels of anxiety and fear and felt more despair and hopelessness. The situation changes dramatically for those in pairs or with family groups. People mentioned that being accompanied by others decreases their sense of fear, ensures their security a bit better, and prevents the development of further or deeper levels of mental health issues. They also mentioned that being accompanied defends them from being targeted by harassment and violence. This understanding was shared by both men and women but was particularly highlighted by younger women. This was also the experience of the Roma Rough Sleeper Team, as affirmed in their learning outcomes, which highlighted that Roma experiencing rough sleeping might choose to sleep in hotspot areas with families, extended families, or people from the same area to form safety networks.

This also influences the willingness of individuals to leave their extended families behind, as in this example provided by Jenny Travassos, Director of Services and New Developments at The Passage.

"I remember we had a case of a man who was maybe in his early 70s and he was severely disabled and he would be part of the group that was seen begging in and around the specific area in Westminster and we thought 'This is awful. There's no way this man should be sitting on the street'. We had to go through what's called adult social care legislation to get him housed, but then, unfortunately, the gentleman didn't want to leave his family group because he would be the only one to sleep indoors."

Another example was given by a young couple, Jason and Megane. Jason travelled alone to the United Kingdom for the first time in 2021. He used to sleep on the streets every night, fearing that either the police would come and pick him up or someone would attack him and steal his belongings. He mostly ate unhealthy and cold food or anything he received from passers-by. He worked for cash in hand and begged sometimes. After three months, his wife wanted to come to be with him and not leave him alone.

According to Jason, "Before, I was alone, I used to eat

bad food, sleep always with fear, sometimes not even sleeping at all, all the time in alert and being anxious that something bad can happen to me. Now at least I have my wife and when we are together, I fear less, we sometime cook warm food in the park, and we protect one another."

This study shows that, when possible, the Roma experiencing rough sleeping choose to travel in or form groups. Interviewees explained that they preferred to migrate with family members or friends because they lack English language skills, and have limited experience with living abroad and sleeping rough. Furthermore, the Roma service users interviewed mentioned that migrating in groups or in couples gives them a stronger sense of safety when sleeping rough and/or working informally, and it eases the mental health challenges they face.

Katie stated, "Life on the streets is horrible. You need to be alert all the time. Many times our belongings were stolen, including our blankets, so we were hiding them well in the bushes. Before, police were messing with us, people around us show us the finger and swear at us, we don't understand everything, but we can see when someone doesn't like us or talked bad to us... At least we are together and now we are inside. But you don't know how difficult it is when we are on the streets, still, people harass us, especially if they see people alone."

2.11 Main Conclusions About Roma Experiencing Rough Sleeping

In Westminster 24.8% of the people recorded on CHAIN[6] as rough sleeping between April 2021 to March 2022 were Romanian nationals, and 15.8% self-identified as either Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller, White – Gypsy/Irish Traveller, or White - Roma.

Of the 18 Roma experiencing rough sleeping interviewed in this study:

- Ten had travelled directly to Westminster from Romania, whereas eight had come from other locations in the United Kingdom or other countries. Push factors from Romania included poverty and discrimination in the employment market.
- Pull factors to Westminster included the busy streets where they feel safer.
- Most Roma service users followed a circular migration pattern.
- The majority of the Roma service users interviewed said they felt ashamed when begging.
- The overwhelming majority of Roma service users want to find work in the United Kingdom.
- Roma service users in Westminster have severe physical and mental health needs.
- Roma service users experience harassment, hate crimes, and discrimination on a regular basis, including by the public.
- Roma service users report having been harassed by uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers or police officers, and are consequently afraid of the police.
- Forming groups and sticking together is a coping mechanism in facing harassment, hate crimes, and discrimination.
- Roma appear underrepresented in the caseload of a local modern slavery service, and professionals fear that services may not be identifying individuals who are at risk in that community. At the same time, our interviews suggest that it should not be assumed that most of the Roma clients are subject to modern slavery.

[6] The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), is a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN is the most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping in the UK.

3 Learning Outcomes From the Work by the Roma Rough Sleeping Team and Related Services

In this section, we will capture some learning outcomes from the work that has been done by the Roma Rough Sleeping Team and related services.

In August 2019, a Romani speaking outreach worker joined the Westminster SOS, St Mungo's, and in 2020, the first Roma Romanian mediator joined the SOS team. She became the coordinator of the Roma Rough Sleeping Team, which was run as a pilot project between January and December 2021 with funding from the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities. Another Roma mediator joined the Roma Rough Sleeping Team in March 2021. The pilot ended in December 2021, and the Roma Rough Sleeping Team started running as a regular service from January 2022, with four staff members. Attached to the service are an immigration advisor and a Roma employment coach working at The Passage.

At the end of the pilot period, learning outcomes were documented in a publication that highlighted the following:

- When supporting Roma individuals, it is critical to recognise their personal experiences of racism, as well as the impact of being part of a community that has been discriminated against for many generations.
- Over half of the Roma experiencing rough sleeping speak Romani rather than Romanian and might struggle to understand Romanian translators.
- Many Roma have poor experiences when engaging with services and are distrustful and fearful of institutions.
- When approaching Roma experiencing rough sleeping, it is, therefore, pivotal to build trust and engage in a culturally sensitive way when, for example, facilitating access to healthcare and immigration advice.

3.1 The Roma Rough Sleeping Team

In an interview for this report, one of the Roma mediators in the team stated: *"Our work is extremely important. They cannot speak English. In front of the public and local authorities, we are their words because we share a common language and culture. They trust us with sensitive information, and basically, we build trust much faster and try to address their issues/needs better."*

The team is staffed by a service manager, a coordinator, and three Roma mediators. All team members identify as Roma or have extensive experience of working with Roma population, and all but one of the team members speak Romani. The team works closely with other services and is supported by St Mungo's director of Rough Sleeper Westminster, Migrant Services, and the head of Migrant and Advice Service.

'Roma mediators' as a concept was created and developed by Romani CRISS in Romania. Romani CRISS is a human rights NGO established in 1993 "which defends and promotes the rights of Roma in Romania." They initiated the 'Roma mediators' model in 1997 in order to support Roma to access their rights in areas such as education and health. The success of the mediators led to it becoming a public policy in Romania in 2002. As it was recognized as 'best practice' at the European level, it was adopted by several European countries. In 2011, the Council of Europe initiated training of Roma mediators through the ROMED1 Programme focusing on "supporting better communication and

co-operation between Roma and public institutions (school, health-care providers, employment offices, local authorities etc.)." The programme was followed by ROMED2 in 2013, which focused on democratic governance and community participation. Through the ROMED1 and ROMED2 programmes, more than 1500 Roma mediators have been trained and certified in more than 20 countries.

In working to improve their work with Roma experiencing rough sleeping in Westminster, St Mungo's hired the first Roma mediator, who had been one of the initiators of Romani CRISS and its mediation programme in Romania. She had hands-on experience working with marginalized Roma and ethnic conflict in Romania, and as a leading figure in Romani feminism, she also brought new perspectives on the specific needs of Romani women. She has worked with St Mungo's since 2020. She explained:

"Roma mediation works from the principle that Roma don't need specific provisions but need support to access their rights."

"In Romania, Roma mediators worked as bridges for Roma to access education and health care, but they also worked to solve inter-ethnic conflicts. There was a time when non-Roma Romanians were burning the houses of Roma to the ground. The mediators were very successful in supporting Roma. But they also improved the relationships between the Roma and non-Roma in villages."

Petra Salva (St Mungo's Director of Rough Sleeper, Westminster and Migrant Services) explains that for St Mungo's it is important that their approaches are proven to work, which is one of the reasons why they invested in Roma mediators.

"We opted for Roma mediation because it is a concept that has proven to work. It has worked for Roma in Romania, but also in other countries across Europe. Our pioneering work in Westminster is therefore based on a solid base of knowledge and experience."

The overall aims of the Roma mediator project in Westminster are to accomplish the following:

- Gain a better understanding of the issues facing Roma people experiencing rough sleeping in London and gather evidence to inform action.
- Work in a more inclusive way and improve fair access

to services and outcomes for this group. Reduce Roma rough sleeping in London.

Work Done by the Roma Rough Sleeping Team in Numbers

	Pilot Roma Rough Sleeping Team: December 2021-December 2022	Roma Rough Sleeping Team: at service: January 2022=March 2022
Total number of individuals the team worked with	279	80
Number of individuals on the caseload	64	52
Access to EU Settlement Scheme immigration advice	59	44
Short-term accommodations	66	12
Long-term accommodations	4	1
Safeguarding cases	11	1
Training delivered to different professionals	120	15
Pan London Roma Group meetings	9	2

Caseload

In their intensive casework, the Roma mediators have focused on finding routes into accommodation. Outreach teams refer people to the Roma mediators, and the mediators tend to work with the Roma service users with complex needs or safeguarding concerns; couples and family groups; individuals for whom employment is a possible route away from the street (pre-settled status); and individuals requiring support to access immigration

advice.

Access to EU Settlement Scheme Immigration Advice

The Roma mediators facilitate routes to employment and support people to access immigration advice. Intensive work has been carried out to support individuals to apply through the EU Settlement Scheme. Through outreach actions, the Roma mediators collaborated with other outreach teams and immigration advisers from Street Legal and The Passage, and over a 15-month period, they supported 103 people in applying. Fourteen of the 18 service users interviewed for this study were supported by the Roma mediators to obtain pre-settled or settled status.

Short-Term Accommodations

During COVID-19 and SWEP, St Mungo's provided emergency accommodation to household groups including larger family groups of up to eight people.

Long-Term Accommodations

Supporting Roma clients into long-term accommodation is ongoing work. For some people, the route into accommodation might be through work, which would mean supporting them to get a National Insurance number, gathering evidence of their work history, and/or enabling them to access the benefits system.

Of those interviewed:

- **4** were accommodated in a long-term hostel.
- **7** in hotels.
- **7** were sleeping rough at that moment

Safeguarding Cases

Some people from the Roma community have severe health issues. For them, the professionals might go through Care Act assessments and human rights assessments to advocate for these individuals to be able to remain in the United Kingdom based on health vulnerabilities. Other cases involve children under 18, and in these cases, the Roma mediators have advocated for children's services to look after the families in question.

Delivered Trainings

The Roma Rough Sleeping Team has delivered training to raise awareness about working with Roma people for staff working in various services, including a range of stakeholders in Westminster. Between December 2021 and March 2022, 135 people from across the United Kingdom received this training, including internal services and outreach teams outside of St Mungo's and other partners. The training covered (a) the situation for Roma in different countries in Europe; (b) antigypsyism, including the persecution Roma have endured historically; and (c) cultural sensitivity. The overall goal of the training was for professionals to increase their knowledge and understanding and through this, develop their services positively.

Pan London Roma Group Meetings

St Mungo's has set up an operational stakeholder group, which includes a range of local commissioners, street outreach teams, and faith-based and specialist organisations. This has become a monthly forum for stakeholders in Westminster and beyond to share experiences and emerging good practice. Several professionals described these meetings as valuable for developing their services effectively. The Roma Rough Sleeping Team runs a Pan London Advice line for professionals available five days a week.

What cannot be captured in numbers, however, is how the Roma mediators have built trust and what positive effects this has had on other services.

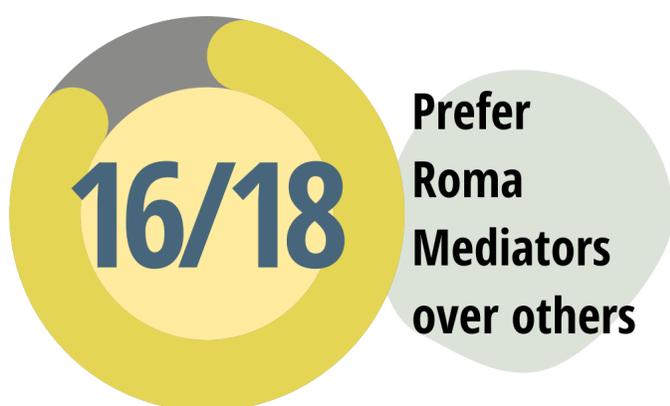
Neither do the numbers tell how the training and Pan London Roma Group meetings have influenced the practices in other services with Roma service users. Furthermore, professionals in other services working with Roma people who are sleeping rough said that their work relies on trust and support built by the Roma mediators. Sixteen of the 18 Roma experiencing rough

sleeping who were interviewed for the study expressed that they have a good relationship with the Roma mediators, that they feel safe speaking to them, that they share a common language, and that they feel the mediators understand them.

Acquaintance with the Roma Mediator Programme



Preference for Roma Mediators



Why they prefer Roma Mediators?

Deeper comprehension/ understanding	Feeling deep trust
Speaking Romani language	Shared story of discrimination

CASE STUDY: JON

Jon, who is in his mid-forties, is in the United Kingdom with his son and wife, Mary. Jon had also experienced homelessness in Romania. The Roma mediators helped the couple to access immigration advice to achieve settled status and to find a home in the United Kingdom. In Westminster, they carry out informal street work and begging. Jon previously begged in Italy, but in Romania, he worked on a daily basis in, for example, construction or agriculture. He had a chainsaw and went around cutting people's wood for the winter. His education level is minimal; he is semi-literate. He can read a bit and write, but his wife is completely illiterate. They want to stay in the United Kingdom because at home, they have many mouths to feed. Currently, they take care of their children and grandchildren with the money gained from begging. They do not want to return to Romania because they are afraid that they will starve there:

"I have a good relationship with the mediators and the organisation; they are good people to us. They helped us. Before we slept on cement and cold pavement, thanks to them, we have been indoors for a couple of months now."

CASE STUDY: PETER

Peter in his late twenties and comes from a village near Botosani, Romania. He came to London six months ago but has been travelling back and forth for approximately eight years. He survives from cash in hand from either car washes or construction. He is now begging and is here alone while his wife and children are back home, depending on him:

"I know almost all the mediators from St Mungo's. I sleep outdoors now, but they said they will come on Sunday to an appointment here at Marble Arch. They will help me to reschedule an appointment at the immigration office to solve my documents. My relationship with them is good; they respect me, and we communicate. Even when I was home in Romania, I called Lidia for help, and she responded."

Several of our interviewees pointed out a discrepancy between the perceptions and assumptions of the general public and bodies working with homelessness and their

work with Roma experiencing rough sleeping.

As one professional put it, *"There is the general view that Roma experiencing rough sleeping will not engage in anything. The Passage and St Mungo's is trying to put together an evidence base to show that this is not true."*

3.2 A Roma Clinic

Nurses from the Homeless Health Service and Great Chapel Street Medical Centre were already providing joint street outreach with St Mungo's in Westminster. In response to the severe health needs and barriers to accessing healthcare that were experienced by the Roma community they met on the street, this partnership set up a dedicated Roma clinic in December 2020. The aim of the clinic was to address these health inequalities by improving Roma people's access to GP registration and primary care.

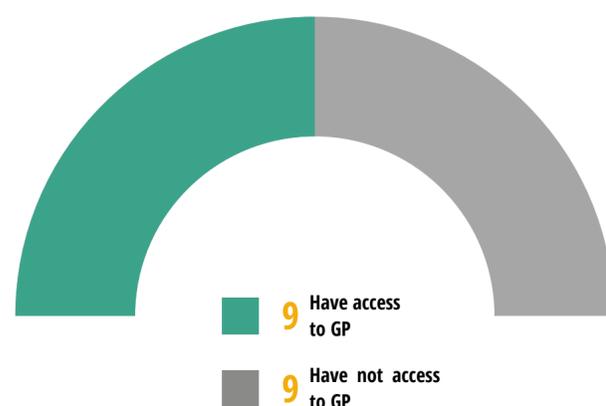
According to a Roma mediator:

"All my Roma clients come with a very deteriorated health state. Males and females suffer from severe health problems, and that's not surprising considering people's background in poverty and for sleeping rough for so many years. So my first priority is actually to make sure to get a GP and then referrals to experts who can change that, so this Roma clinic is invaluable."

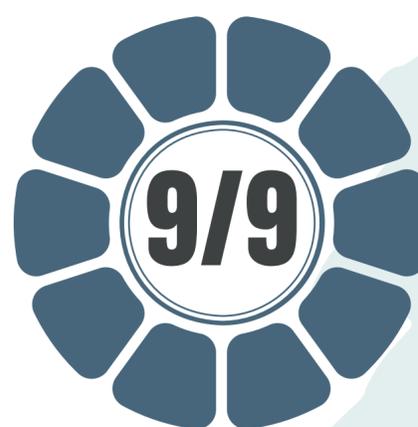
The clinic was initially delivered weekly at a day centre in North Westminster, near a common sleep site for people from the Roma community. Following a review, it was moved to Great Chapel Street Medical Centre, so that people who attended could immediately become familiar with the location of their new GP practice. Roma mediators now work in partnership with clinical nurse specialists to provide the clinic once a month.

Roma mediators accompany their service users to the clinic, improving trust and confidence in the health service and providing ongoing support to access follow up care. Nurses offer longer appointment slots to allow multiple health issues to be discussed and have expertise in providing care to people with complex health and social needs. New patients in the Roma clinic are also offered screening tests for chronic diseases and blood borne viruses, vaccinations, and assistance to apply for free NHS prescriptions, dental and optician care.

Levels of access to GP of the 18 interviewees



Levels of access to GP



Of those who have GP have achieved it through the service

3.3 Cultural Sensitivity, Language Competence, and Building Trust

According to the service manager of the St Mungo's SOS outreach team, the cultural training they received from the Roma mediators has changed the way they work:

"I remember at the beginning we approached encampments of maybe 20 Roma all together. Language skills were absolutely key, but it goes further. We were not yet culturally aware of the best ways to engage. We didn't understand the different cultures to the extent that was needed to build trust and relationships. We might do certain things like approach a young female and talk about health in front of the men in the family group. We were often just handed ID cards from individuals without much interaction. We could have been coming from anywhere, from the police, for example."

The importance of building trust was underscored by all the professionals interviewed, although some also raised the point that trust is not enough if it does not lead to better living conditions. Practitioners explained that low literacy levels make it more difficult for service users to trust them. The interviews with the Roma service users also show that the Roma who migrate to the United Kingdom and experience rough sleeping have a background of poverty, marginalisation, experiences of racism, and fear and distrust in the authorities. That the mediators and some outreach workers speak Romanian or even Romani has been described as paramount because it has allowed them to explain services and procedures and record people's details to better understand the group they are working with.

The impression of the Roma mediators and other frontline workers is that they are largely trusted by Roma service users. They described that the Roma experiencing rough sleeping approach them for support in areas such as health, access to benefits, employment, and accommodation. One of the outreach workers gave the following example:

"When we started supporting people to apply for the EU settlement scheme, 1st January 2021, only a small number were willing to, for example, send their ID cards to the Home Office. It was not an easy request from us. Once we started working with them and saw that they would get a status and get back their IDs, they encouraged themselves to work with us."

Roma mediators accompany their service users to the clinic, improving trust and confidence in the health service and providing ongoing support to access

follow up care. As mentioned above, nurses offer longer appointment slots to allow multiple health issues to be discussed and have expertise in providing care to people with complex health and social needs. New patients in the Roma clinic are also offered screening tests for chronic diseases and blood borne viruses, vaccinations, and assistance to apply for free NHS prescriptions, dental and optician care.

3.4 Actions Related to COVID-19

Although how COVID-19 affected Roma experiencing rough sleeping and the homelessness sector is not the topic of this report, it did, of course, impact the work of the Roma mediators. We will therefore address a couple of learning outcomes from the COVID-19 response and Everyone In.

In their interviews, professionals mainly focused on how the outbreak of COVID-19 provided momentum for innovation, proving that a lot can be achieved if the resources and goodwill are there. As one of the Roma mediators put it:

"At the outbreak of COVID-19, everything changed. It was a major interruption in work. On the one hand, it brought everyone inside, demonstrating that it is indeed possible to get everyone off the street if the willingness and resources are there. On the other hand, it was a major interruption to the regular work St Mungo's was building."

Specifically, the Everyone In initiative provided the opportunity to, for the first time, accommodate Roma couples and families together.

As one professional put it, *"The pandemic led to the system opening up."*

The SOS Outreach team manager also explained how the COVID-19 pandemic meant a shift in focus:

"During the pandemic everyone who was on the street, regardless of where you were from or what your circumstances were, a health assessment was our first port of call. And the pandemic was a huge opportunity where we moved away from housing people based on their eligibility and housed people based on their vulnerability. Treating homelessness as a public health crisis rather than a housing one was instrumental in what we came to achieve."

During the pandemic, the mediators and outreach workers offered people experiencing rough sleeping the opportunity to move into the hotels provided. Several professionals testified that a number of Roma chose instead to travel back to Romania because they had family members there. When this was their wish, the outreach workers and Roma mediators helped individuals to return. Consequently, the Roma individuals who chose to stay in the hotels provided were mainly single men. Once they were in the hotels, it was easier for the mediators to carry out case work with them.

Of the 18 people interviewed, 11 had accommodation, either in hotels or hostels. All the cases of accommodation were achieved via the initiative Everyone In.

Accommodation achievement



Jenny Travassos, Director of Services and New Developments at The Passage, explains their investment in employment:

"Our role as part of this new contract is to make a wholehearted attempt to help people regularise their employment. Regularising their employment would be a way to be able to house them."

Roma Employment Coach data	March - June 2022
Number of individuals who receive work ready assessments /accessed Roma Employment Coach support	19
Number of individuals offered full-time employment	9
Number of individuals who accessed employment*	4

The Passage has had a Roma Employment Coach employed since March 2022. She explained that the service users are very excited about work opportunities but that many express anxieties about starting work due to not being able to speak the language and having been marginalised for so long. This is why building trust is fundamental. Some Roma have a grounded mistrust in institutions due to experiences with antigypsyism, which makes building – and maintaining – trust both more difficult and even more important. In the words of the Roma employment coach at The Passage:

"The longer we spend together and the more times we meet, the more they open and the more they talk about their experience and how they feel. Spending time with them, I have definitely seen that they don't trust institutions; they fear them."

Building and maintaining trust is long-term work, which is complicated by funding structures with time limits and geographical boundaries. Finding work is not always straightforward, and the professionals see a need to work holistically with Roma service users, including in areas such as literacy, English-language, and learning what it means to

3.5 Finding Employment

do contracted work. Many Roma experiencing rough sleeping are too physically vulnerable to carry out different kinds of work but not physically vulnerable enough to access public funds.

The Roma Employment Coach explained that many of the Roma clients she works with have back and knee problems, which make it difficult to lift items or move around. This is an obstacle as much of the work she is able to find for them is manual labour. Most service users have previously done cash-in-hand work and have to learn what it means to have contracted work, in terms of both rights and obligations.

The combination of mistrust in institutions, experiences with antigypsyism, and low levels of literacy and English-language skills makes it even more important for many to stay close to their safety net. The Roma employment coach explained that several service users want to work in couples:

"In one instance, he was reliant on her because he was illiterate. In another couple case, they had spent their whole life together; they have that really close relationship, and it would cause anxiety to be separated. They feel safer together. I have not encountered couples where one partner has come across as been more controlling than the other."

As a result, it is necessary to find employers who are willing to hire couples and let them work together.

3.6 Countering Antigypsyism

As described earlier, Roma experiencing rough sleeping face antigypsyism from the public, from uniformed enforcers, and in trying to access services. The professionals interviewed in this study have witnessed this and work towards countering antigypsyism. A major part of this work has been the training offered by the Roma mediators.

Several professionals interviewed highlighted that their main work in countering antigypsyism is done through escalating individual cases but that they rarely have the capacity to work systematically on the issue.

In the words of the service manager for the Westminster SOS at St Mungo's:

"We have scratched the surface, but we are not anywhere near a place we would like to leave it. But in every case, we try to escalate to get things nearer how we want things to be in the future. It is easy for us to escalate that individual case, we get the outcome we want, and we move on because we have xyz and lots more people that we need to get off the street, and it is easy to forget that this is actually part of a wider problem, we have seen 10 cases that have had similar things."

3.7 Main Learning Outcomes

The Roma Rough Sleeping Team, has been highly successful and has changed how St Mungo's and The Passage work with Roma people. Over the 15 months from December 2021 to March 2022:

The Roma Clinic has successfully supported Roma service users' access to healthcare. Building trust is key for all services to be successful, including supporting Roma service users in obtaining employment and accommodation. Professionals counter antigypsyism through escalating individual cases, but more systematic work is needed.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

In this section, we will offer policy and practice recommendations relating to reducing destitution and rough sleeping amongst Roma people who have been homeless in Westminster and beyond.

When comparing the findings from the 2016 Roma Support Group study with the findings presented in this report, it is obvious that huge improvements have been made.

- In 2016, the services did not engage to a large extent with Roma. In 2022, we found that they are now very involved with this group. During the period January 2021 to March 2022 the Roma mediators, for example, engaged with 359 Roma service users. Sixteen of the 18 Roma experiencing rough sleeping who were interviewed for the study expressed that they had a good relationship with the Roma mediators, and we found that this trust has been pivotal for their access to services beyond the Roma Rough Sleeping Team.
- In 2016, the Roma experiencing rough sleeping did not have the necessary knowledge of services that could help them. In 2022, we found that they know about the services offered by St Mungo's and The Passage, trust them, and turn to them for help.
- In 2016, there was a lack of knowledge about Roma and their situation. In 2022, we found that professionals are aware and generally knowledgeable. Professionals emphasised that the Pan London Roma Group meetings and the trainings provided by the Roma mediators have been key for this.
- The 2016 study showed that many Roma practiced circular migration. At the same time, most wanted to stay in the United Kingdom. This finding was confirmed in this study: 15 of the 18 interviewees expressed that they wanted to stay permanently in the United Kingdom.

All in all, we have found that the new approaches to working with Roma people have been highly successful. Our basic recommendation is that the Roma Rough Sleeping Team and related services be given long-term funding so that the services can be embedded. In addition, we will provide some more detailed recommendations on how the services can continue and develop.

Based on our findings, we recommend that the Westminster Homelessness Partnership work to influence relevant policymakers and other stakeholders in local, regional, and national government in order to provide the following emergency responses and long-term initiatives.

4.1 Emergency Responses

We propose that the Roma Rough Sleeping team continue to work on both a short-term and long-term basis. We further recommend that the successful services are expanded to other relevant areas of London. Our data show that most of the Roma experiencing rough sleeping would like to stay in the United Kingdom, which makes it important to work towards that goal. At the same time, emergency interventions are needed to meet acute needs and ease the work with long-term alternatives. The Roma service users interviewed for this study gave clear recommendations on what services they needed. They need temporary shelters, a kitchen where they can cook and eat, showers, washing machines, and help with paperwork. They clearly stated that they want more Roma mediators or outreach workers who speak Romani or Romanian and that they would like help with finding employment so they can work.

Emergency Accommodation

We recommend that emergency accommodation be provided for all Roma experiencing rough sleeping in London. This is a strong wish of the Roma service users interviewed in the study. Rough sleeping has severe consequences on the Roma service users' health, including mental health, which traps them in a vicious cycle, making it more difficult for them to find employment and permanent housing.

Finland is currently the only country in the EU where the number of homeless people is decreasing. They work from the principle that accommodation is the basis for a person's rehabilitation (Pleace, 2019; Y-FOUNDATION, 2021; World Habitat, 2022). Shelters might also be a way of preventing exploitation and facilitating permanent solutions for Roma experiencing rough sleeping.

In a study of EU migrants experiencing rough sleeping in the Scandinavian capitals, Friberg and Tyldum (2019) found that the provision of shelters constitutes a protective factor against human trafficking as it makes migrants less dependent on risky intermediaries ready to exploit their need for a safe space to sleep.

Some practical recommendations on emergency responses are as follows:

- Many will not be willing to spend much money on accommodation because they prioritise sending money to their dependants in Romania. The emergency accommodation should therefore be free or offered for a minimal fee.
- It is important that emergency accommodation is catered to couples and larger family groups who would like to stay in the same unit.
- The emergency accommodation should serve as a hub for Roma experiencing rough sleeping where several services are offered. Services being spread across localities becomes an extra burden for people experiencing rough sleeping, as considerable time and energy must be spent moving between services to have their basic needs met (see Misje, 2021). This regulates their everyday life and wastes time and energy from service users which might otherwise have been spent on working for long-term solutions.
- It is the experience of the Roma mediators that Roma service users are much more likely to accept accommodation if they are in the borough in which they are rough sleeping and part of an "In for good" offer. They are less likely to accept accommodation for a small number of nights, after which they will be asked to leave.

Immigration Advice

All Roma service users should receive qualified immigration advice, to understand their legal opportunities in the United Kingdom. Their aims and wishes for their stay in the United Kingdom should be mapped out, and a plan should be developed. A lot of this is already being done by St Mungo's and The Passage through, for example, the Roma mediators, employment services, and appropriately qualified immigration advisers, but the professionals pointed out that their work would be significantly more effective if the Roma service users were offered emergency accommodation. Having a roof over their head will take some of the pressure off Roma service users so they can engage with the services offered. The emergency accommodation would also provide a stable location for professionals to meet with service users. The manager of the Roma rough sleeping team, pointed out that many Roma service users have "the mentality of a migrant." Intergenerational experiences of discrimination and years of Roma communities ending up begging for a living in Western European societies have led to some Roma service users not believing that settling in the United Kingdom is a realistic option. This makes education about legal options and barriers even more important.

4.2 Long-Term Initiatives

4.2.1 A Rights-Based Approach

We found that the right-based approach developed and employed at St Mungo's is a major strength. We highly recommend that all further initiatives targeting Roma experiencing homelessness in London continue with this approach. In practical terms, this would mean:

- On-going analysis of what rights Roma experiencing rough sleeping have in the United Kingdom in general.
- Working with individuals to access qualified immigration advice and to understand their rights in the United Kingdom (e.g., according to the EU Settlement Scheme, rights of individuals with

particular vulnerabilities related to, e.g., care act assessments, trafficking).

- Continue and strengthen the Roma Rough Sleeping Team and the Roma employment coach service. Both teams would benefit from permanent funding and larger teams.
- Providers and commissioners of services for street homeless people should investigate how each of their services can be made accessible to people in couples and family groups who otherwise might be excluded.

4.2.2 Long-Term Accommodation

This report has pointed to several challenges related to securing long-term accommodation for Roma experiencing rough sleeping, including how they are tied up with the EU Settlement Scheme, rights to welfare benefits, and employment opportunities. Despite challenges, the situation at present is unsustainable: The Greater London Authority pointed out in 2018 that people from Central and Eastern European countries make up 18% of London's rough sleepers with support needs but only 2% of those in supported accommodation. Such discrepancies in numbers might indicate structural discrimination, which is why continuing a Roma-focused service such as the Roma Rough Sleeping Team is utterly important. The team has so far helped five individuals into long-term accommodation. But the relatively high number of service users linked to other measures, such as the Roma employment coach at The Passage, indicates that far more Roma people can be helped into long-term accommodation if the funding is continued.

We recommend:

- Strengthen the Roma Rough Sleeping Team to expand their capacity to focus on finding accommodation for Roma clients. This would include capacity to work closely with Roma service users to explore and understand what options they would accept as couples, nuclear families, and extended families.

4.2.3 Employment

Our research clearly shows that the Roma service users are eager to find work in the UK. We found the work of the Roma employment coach at the passage to be very promising, as she had in the first few months of work

managed to find employment for several individuals. At the same time, her work shows that the route to employment is not a straight line and that long-term investments are needed to achieve positive results.

We recommend:

- Make the funding for Roma employment coaches long-term.
- Continue education of Roma service users on possibilities for employment.
- Continue language courses and other relevant training.
- Explore whether collaboration with , for example, The Big Issue in London could be a way to prepare Roma clients for employment. Anecdotal evidence from other contexts suggests that offering the opportunity to sell magazines builds trust, but there is a need for more research into whether selling magazines has led to other work opportunities, whether it helps people off the streets, and whether sellers experience it as a dignified way of earning money.
- Pilot work training projects where Roma service users are paid to participate. As an example, in Oslo, the Church City Mission piloted a sewing project in 2014–2015, which gave a few Roma women temporary work and training. In collaboration with a designer, they gave courses in sewing, and the women were paid to participate in the courses. They learned new skills and received a diploma that could help them when applying for other jobs.
- Explore the option of transnational collaboration on finding employment. As an example, the Salvation Army in Stockholm are in the process of developing a transnational collaboration on job opportunities. As some participants struggle to find work in Sweden, they support them in finding jobs in other EU countries (e.g., Holland and Germany) through their contacts.

4.2.4 Health

Our research suggests that there are severe health needs among many of the Roma clients, that their conditions are worsened by sleeping rough. As a response, a Roma clinic was established in Westminster, where Roma mediators work in partnership with clinical nurse specialists. The clinic is located at the Great Chapel Street Medical Centre, so clients immediately become familiar with the location of their GP. According to out interviews with Roma clients, the Roma mediators and the Roma clinic has improved access to healthcare, but the experience of the Roma clients is that health conditions too often go untreated, and that they lack access to mental health services.

We recommend that:

- The Roma clinic continue and expand their services in locations where Roma clients can also access a GP.
- The Roma clinic work with the NHS and specialist mental health teams such as the JHT to improve access to mental health support and treatment for Roma clients.

4.2.5 Enhance Dialogue with uniformed security guards, civil enforcement officers and police

All 18 Roma service users interviewed in this study described being afraid in London. They fear ill-treatment from passers-by, people under the influence of drink or drugs, and uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers and the police. Harassment and fear dictate the lives of the Roma service users to a large extent: protecting oneself is the first priority, influencing their forming of groups, whether they will accept individual offers for accommodation and employment, and their willingness to engage with services. If they were safe, they could have instead planned their days and lives towards what would build a future, but at present, they are caught up in surviving day to day. Feeling safer could contribute to enhancing people's resilience so they could, to a larger extent, direct their energy toward building a better future.

In the experience of the Roma service users interviewed for this study, uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers and the police are contributing towards making Roma service users feel unsafe. Both the Roma service users themselves and the professionals working closely with them described ill-treatment during forced removal from rough sleeping sites, threatening behaviour, and racial profiling in taking people's ID cards.

We recommend:

- The Pan London Roma Group should explore how to promote best practice among uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers and the police when they come in contact with Roma experiencing rough sleeping.
- Create a position within the police force dedicated to combatting antigypsyism and hate crimes against Roma.

- Invest in training of uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers and the police on antigypsyism. In addition to the training already provided by, for example, Roma mediators, inspiration might be drawn from the 2019–2020 EU project implemented by Skåne City Mission and Civil Rights Defenders aiming at combating hate crimes against vulnerable EU citizens of Roma origin in Malmö, Sweden.

4.2.6 Businesses: Enhance Dialogue and Partnerships

Our interviews suggest that some local businesses or shop owners take part in escalating the hostility from uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers or the police towards Roma experiencing rough sleeping. This might result from a fear that the "display of poverty" and "aggressive begging" have a negative effect on tourism and business. There has been some positive development in other contexts where close dialogue with people begging has led to a common understanding of what is acceptable and beneficial (e.g., where, when, and how begging is accepted). This would be a more humane way forward than different forms of policing. It might be worth exploring whether local firms/businesses would be willing to fund the following initiatives:

- Employing a professional with specific responsibility for dialogue and mediation between local businesses and Roma experiencing rough sleeping and/or carrying out begging and informal street work. Learning outcomes could be drawn from, for example, Church City Mission in Oslo, where they had a project: in an area where "aggressive begging" was seen as a problem, Roma service users were employed to clean the streets and participate in courses on language and knitting. Contracts were signed with participants about participation but also that they would adhere to agreed-on regulations regarding where and how to beg and sell magazines. The project became a game changer for the relationship between the Roma service users and the business owners.
- A mentorship/employment programme where local businesses give employment opportunities to some of the people carrying out begging and informal street work in front of their shops.

4.2.7 Efforts to Combat Modern Slavery

We found that trafficking or modern slavery are concerns for many of the professionals in the sector. On the one hand, professionals in close contact with Roma clients believe that most Roma clients are not subject to modern slavery. At the same time, Roma appear to be underrepresented in the caseloads of the modern slavery service which may indicate that services are not reaching vulnerable individuals in that community.

We recommend the following:

- Continue the ongoing work to build trust with Roma service users. In line with recommendations given by the European Roma Rights Centre (2011), we recommend collaboration with Roma organisations, and strengthening competences on modern slavery among Roma professionals, such as the Roma mediators. Continue and strengthen the modern slavery team at The Passage, making sure that professionals have updated knowledge on antigypsyism, the circumstances facing the Roma population, migration and vulnerable groups. The modern slavery team at the Passage has the potential to build a model that can be copied in other boroughs and cities.
- More information and research are needed to understand the dynamics at play among Roma experiencing rough sleeping. Part of this might come from a study similar to the one mentioned above by Friberg and Tyldum (2019), and part might come from enhancing cultural knowledge, such as from Roma mediators.
- Intensify collaboration with the European Roma Rights Centre and others who have specialised competence on trafficking/exploitation in Romani communities.

4.2.8 Efforts to Combat Antigypsyism

In Europe so-called “Roma policies” have been criticised for focusing too heavily on Roma. According to Piemontese and Magazzini (2019), Roma are often portrayed as belonging “within a ‘deficit’ or ‘marginalised’ paradigm (either in cultural or socio-economic terms), which effectively constructs them as a policy problem, rather than the regimes of inequality upon which our societies are built, and of which Roma individuals are part and parcel of” (p. 6). In an evaluation of the Swedish Roma inclusion strategy, the Emerga Institute exemplifies what such approaches might lead to: “The interventions have been primarily targeted at the Roma community and

aimed at increasing their trust and confidence in the various municipal entities. On the other hand, relatively few interventions, besides information and awareness raising, have been targeted at the municipal and state sectors where structural discrimination occurs. The focus has thus been on strengthening the trust of the Roma community in the administration.”

Initiatives are, in other words, aimed at making Roma trust antigypsyist institutions. We would therefore follow the recommendation of Klaus and Marsh (2014), who wrote that:

“Social inclusion can only be accomplished if programmes that support Roma children and families are paired with programmes that address prejudice, xenophobia and discrimination in majority populations” (p. 343).

We found that even among some of the professionals working in the homeless sector, there is a tendency to reproduce stereotypes or prejudices about Roma. There are several relevant bodies to collaborate with and learn from in this respect. For example, the Department for Destitute Migrants at the Church City Mission in Oslo has worked systematically on encouraging and helping service users with reporting incidents of racism and discrimination, enhancing the existing reporting mechanisms to include antigypsyism.

They also work systematically to make the voices of Roma experiencing rough sleeping heard and strengthen their participation in the public debate. At the EU centre at the Salvation Army in Stockholm, they work towards opinion formation by raising issues EU migrants face in their meetings in healthcare, the labour market, housing, and integration.

Our recommendations are as follows:

- Continuous training of all professionals in the homeless sector on antigypsyism.
- Continuous training on Romani history and antigypsyism by Roma mediators.
- Employ a professional to tackle antigypsyism as their specialised field of work, attached to the Roma Rough Sleeping Team.
- Enhance collaboration with, for example, media, uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers and or the police, and children’s services to address antigypsyism.

4.3 Further Research

This study has clearly shown that the practitioners working closely with Roma service users have in-depth understanding of the challenges they face and what is needed to improve their situation. At the same time, we see a discrepancy between the knowledge on the ground and the extent to which this knowledge is captured in research and policy formation. We therefore recommend that more research be funded in the work towards providing an evidence-based approach.

We recommend a longitudinal study with elements from action research. We believe that this approach would provide more thorough knowledge on both the service users and what initiatives work for them. At the moment the evidence base is weak in both areas – new initiatives are tested, and the professionals are constantly breaking new ground in finding out what the needs are and what does and does not work for this group. Longitudinal research with elements from action research would better capture the knowledge being created. This approach would also provide a better knowledge exchange between researchers and practitioners. The goal would be for the researchers and practitioners in collaboration to create a model that works.

In practical terms, we recommend that:

- The GLA fund the development of appropriate research proposals which could be then be used to apply for funding from, for example, Rowntree Foundation, the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) or the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The proposal should be developed in close collaboration between the WHP, the Roma Rough Sleeping Team and other stakeholders.

4.4 Main Conclusions and Recommendations

All in all, we have found that the new approaches to working with Roma people have been highly successful, and our basic recommendation is that the Roma Rough Sleeping Team and related services are given funding to continue their work long-term.

As an emergency response, we recommend providing emergency accommodation and immigration advice.

As long-term initiatives, we recommend:

- A continued rights-based approach, including strengthening legal advice given to Roma service users. Continuing the promising work by the Roma employment coach, including innovative work with trainings and routes to employment.
- Structuring and intensifying dialogue between uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers and the police and the Pan London Roma Group.
- Employing staff specifically responsible for countering antigypsyism within the police force, and investing in training of uniformed security staff, civil enforcement officers and the police on antigypsyism.
- Continuing intensive training in the homelessness sector to counter antigypsyism.
- Employing a professional responsible for work on antigypsyism within the Roma Rough Sleeping Team Enhancing dialogue and partnerships with businesses to create work opportunities and better relationships.
- Continue building trust and permanently fund the modern slavery team to disclose and tackle modern slavery.
- Funding further research to strengthen the knowledge base and facilitate an evidence-based approach.

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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of any of the other organisations mentioned in this report.

Appendix A

A Brief History of Roma in Romania

It is believed that the Roma people arrived in Romanian lands in 1241 (Achim, 2013). Despite the fact that Roma have called Romania their home for centuries, they are still considered by many societies, especially by Romanians, as non-Europeans (Dumitru, 2021). This might be a result of the oppressive history they have endured in Romania, with slavery and genocide as the two most extreme persecutions.

Roma were enslaved in three of the territories making up present-day Romania: Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia. The enslavement lasted from the end of the 1300s, and the last enslaved were freed in the 1850s. During enslavement, Roma were considered the property of their owners: the state, aristocrats, and the Romanian Orthodox Church. They were bought and sold or granted as gifts, and they were often inhumanely treated by their oppressive owners. As an example, children were torn from their parents, it was legal to rape enslaved women, and owners were allowed to punish the enslaved to death.

Less than a century after emancipation from slavery, Roma were again subjected to severe persecution, this time due to racial biology and the Nazi-Fascist regimes in Europe. Under the leadership of Antonescu, who was prime minister in Romania during WWII, at least 25,000 Roma were deported to the concentration camp Transnistria, where half of them were executed or died from starvation, untreated illnesses, or torture. After the war, according to Achim (2013), until 1989 after the fall of Communism, the state ignored the existence of Roma as an ethnic group. They were not included in the list of “cohabiting nationalities.” Consequently, Roma were not represented as an ethnic group at the level of the party and state administration; there were no institutions to promote their collective interests and to deal specifically with the problems of this minority within the limits of the totalitarian Communist state (for more information, see Achim, 1998). At the fall of Communism, anti-Roma sentiments came to the surface, and Roma were subject to lethal hate crimes, including killings and burning of Roma villages (European Roma Rights Centre, 1998).

The impact of joining the EU allowed Romania to experience a small improvement in the standard of living, as well as reform in all areas of public life, from the economy to the judicial system (Observer, 2022). Still, currently, after 15 years, Romania remains the second poorest country in the EU after Bulgaria, the Roma population live below the poverty line and experience living conditions similar to those of developing countries, and migration is on the rise.

The history of Roma in Romania, including enslavement, genocide, and recent ethnic violence, is largely unknown by the general public. Blurred from the writing of history are also the contributions by the Romani people to the Romanian economy and culture. Enslaved Roma contributed vastly towards building Romania as it is today, including building impressive monasteries. Roma have also contributed towards Romanian culture with, for example, design, linguistic diversity, and music but also intellectual work.

The lack of knowledge regarding both the historical persecution of Roma and their contribution to society has led to the establishment of a skewed narrative in Romania. Instead of understanding the poverty experienced by Roma as a result of persecution and exclusion, it is claimed that Roma want to live outside of established society and are not interested in, for example, education and regular work. Instead of naming the positive contributions made by Roma despite continuous persecution, this narrative portrays Roma as incurable “parasites” who have not been responsive to Romanian integration work (Rostas, 2019).

Appendix B: List of interviewees

Roma service users interviewed (all names are pseudonyms)

- Jon (in his 40's)
- Peter (in his 20's)
- Anne (in her 60's)
- Georgia (in her 40's)
- Dave (in his 50's)
- Jen (in her 60's)
- Jason (in his 20s)
- Gael (in her 50's)
- Marianne (in her 40's)
- Jessica (in her 60's)
- Megane (in her 20's)
- Katie (in her 60s)
- Paul (in his 50's)
- Eduard (in his 40's)
- Zoe (in her 60's)
- Sarah (in her 60's)
- Chris (in his 40's)
- Simon (in his 40's)

Other professionals with whom we have consulted for the report

- Hilde Kirkebøen (Previously Church City Mission, Oslo)
- Mari Seilskjær (Previously Church City Mission, Oslo)
- Hilde Enerstvedt Røssehaug (Church City Mission, Haugesund, Norway).
- Tiberius Lakatos (EU Centre, Salvation Army, Stockholm).
- Anca Loredana Enache (Deaconess Foundation, Helsinki).
- Individuals working for Erlik (Oslo), Strada (Copenhagen), Faktum (Göteborg).

Professionals Interviewed

- Jennifer Travassos, Director of Services and New Developments, The Passage
- Petra Salva, Director of Rough Sleeper Westminster and Migrants, St Mungo's
- Services Outreach Coordinator, Westminster Street Outreach Team, St Mungo's
- Roma employment coach, the Passage
- Two Roma mediators, St Mungo's
- Service Manager, Westminster Street Outreach Service, St Mungo's
- Employment Strategy Manager, the Passage
- Interim Rough Sleeping Commissioner at Westminster City Council
- Rough Sleeping Commissioner at Westminster City Council
- Anti-Slavery Coordinator, The Passage
- Outreach Coordinator, Westminster Street Outreach Team, SOS, St Mungo's
- Campaigning and Policy Worker, Roma support group
- Former outreach worker, Manager of the Roma rough sleeping team, St Mungo's
- Migration coordinator, St Mungo's

Appendix C

Ethical Considerations and research methods

Research with vulnerable groups requires ethics to be carefully considered. In this study, there are several intersecting vulnerabilities to consider: ethnicity and experienced racism, gender and sexual orientation, poverty, and illiteracy, as well as a huge gap in access to power, influence, and information between the researchers and participants. Despite this, it is our assessment that the research will not cause unnecessary harm and could contribute towards a better life for the participants. We have built our research on careful ethical considerations.

First, we have adhered to the general ethical standards of voluntary participation, informed consent, and anonymisation: (a) All interviewees were provided with information about the study and informed that their choice of participating or not would not affect their opportunities for receiving support from nongovernmental organisation working with rough sleepers in Westminster and beyond. (b) All informants gave informed consent, either in writing or recorded. (c) All Roma experiencing Rough Sleeping were anonymised in the transcriptions and in this report. The professionals interviewed were given the choice of being anonymised, but all chose to have their names published. The study was evaluated and received consent from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Second, we considered two aspects that are particularly important when conducting research with ethnic minorities. (a) The right to self-definition: Each research participant self-identifies as a member of an ethnic community or not. Ethnic identity is not a scientific concept that the individuals passively receive but also involves choice and identity constructions. In our research, the category Roma is based on self-definition. (b) Respecting and upholding multiple identities in the research: The Roma in our study are not representatives of the ethnic group; they are individuals with multiple identities. By describing Roma as a “group” rather than as individuals with multiple identities, research runs the risk of stigmatising the whole group and adding a burden. It was difficult to conduct interviews in unfavourable weather conditions, in February 2022. The fieldwork had

limited time for more in-depth interviews and for building further trust. In different interview conditions, the re-traumatisation of vulnerable Roma who sleep rough could be avoided. One challenge was to ask obvious questions necessary for the study but that would affect the informants, such as Why are you here? Why do you beg, or how do you cope with rough sleep or racism?

In our case, we run the risk of strengthening the already strong equation between “Roma” and “beggars.” An exaggerated focus on ethnicity further runs the risk of not respecting the individual’s own perception of self. It might be that gender, age, sexuality, class, or profession is a more dominant feature for the individual than their ethnic identity. The fact that our whole project builds on an intersectional framework will help us to acknowledge multiple identities and uphold Roma as a heterogeneous group.

Third, conducting research with people experiencing poverty and rough sleeping poses the questions of remuneration and a false sense of hope. We have remunerated the Roma participants experiencing rough sleeping with a £10 grocery store voucher because we distracted them from their work (e.g., begging, bottle collecting, selling magazines) and because everyone else involved in the research was paid for their time. We were also conscious about the risk of giving people a false sense of hope through giving them the impression that the research would lead to direct change in their lives.

About the Interviews

With the goal of capturing the experiences as much as possible for both men and women, the data were collected in a desegregated manner (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). The second reason was motivated by the fact that Romani women remain an under-researched group, and often their needs and voices remain unheard, especially in rough sleeping. Hence, we sought to involve a proportionate number of women and men in the interviews, with a total of 10 women and 8 men.

The preparation for the interviews started with sharing information about the project and the presentation of the researchers. To follow up on the introductory part, the participants were asked if they were willing to participate in this study (plus oral consent). Considering that building trust takes time, especially when dealing with traumatic/sensitive issues such as being an undocumented migrant, sleeping rough, or surviving on informal work, the researchers tried to undertake the interviews only after meeting the participants and carefully explaining the nature of the study. Luckily, some of the participants were more open than others and offered to speak at the first instance, and in acknowledgment of their uncertain schedule, some interviews were conducted on the spot. Others were conducted according to the participant's requirements (data, hour, location). With the participants who were reluctant, tired, or not in the mood for a chat, a follow-up call and a meeting scheduled before the actual interview were made.

Participant Observation Research

Method

In the most populated areas with Roma sleeping rough, the two researchers did independent outreach not only to recruit participants for the study but also to observe the participants working (begging, selling magazines), attitudes from the public, and reactions from the people on the streets. The goal of this method was to build trust with the participants but also to get more insights into rough sleep in Westminster, particularly rough sleep among Roma individuals. After a couple of hours per day spent on the streets, chatting with people, arranging interviews, and presenting the work, the two researchers witnessed with their own eyes a glimpse of the reality of Roma who sleep rough.

Further reflections and notes from the researchers

a) Experiences of Roma People

Usually, people stay in populated areas so they can be in contact with as many people as possible. They stay down or in front of a shop, café, or restaurant. They carry luggage, blankets, and heavy clothes to protect themselves from the cold. They try to establish contact with people, talk to them, say hello, and so on. They usually sit down or walk in certain areas that they know. They thank everyone who helps, offering money, food, or anything they receive. They usually try to smile to capture people's attention, but they are sad; they look

exhausted.

b) Reactions from the Public

In the hours of observation of various people sitting down, the researchers observed the total "invisibilisation" of bodies who sleep rough, especially Roma. However, people's attitudes vary. Some people react, help, and give food or money, whereas others reject them from entering shops and cafes, stare at them, or look at them with contempt.

c) Racist Attitudes, Roma Stereotypes, and Prejudices

People's attitudes varied. Although many people smiled at us while we talked to Roma in the streets, others approached us directly to tell us that we should not trust Roma women because they might steal from us. When a group interview was conducted in a café, the boss of the café approached and would not let the Roma women sit on the terrace until the researchers bought some coffee and tea. At the same café, before the researchers left, they were warned that they should not trust the Roma. While the researchers conducted the interview with the three Roma, one man and two ladies, the younger employees made fun of the two ladies.

On another day, while an interview was being held on the street at a begging spot, a police officer stopped and stared at us while we interviewed a Roma man. On the same day, another interview was scheduled with a young couple, and the researchers were barely let into a café because they were accompanied by Roma service users (the woman was dressed in a traditional Roma skirt). Before the researchers placed their order, they were asked if they had money to pay while being stared at.

